

MINING THE BIBLE



Micah

“The Bible is not a child’s storybook; rather it is great literature that requires thoughtful response. All its diamonds do not lie exposed on the surface. Its richness is mined only through hard intellectual and spiritual spadework.”

Haddon Robinson, Expository Preaching

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version[®] (ESV[®]), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

INDEX

About 'Mining the Bible'	3
Overview Study	6
Study 1: 1:1-16.....	11
Study 2: 2:1-3:12	17
Study 3: 4:1-13.....	25
Study 4: 5:1-15.....	31
Study 5: 6:1-16.....	37
Study 6: 7:1-20.....	43
Review Study.....	49

ABOUT 'MINING THE BIBLE'

Aim

The aim of these studies is twofold. Firstly, they're designed to help you get to grips with the main message and applications of Micah as a book. There's a second aim though, which is to help equip you to learn to study the Bible for yourself.

How it works

Each study has two sections: Questions and Summary. The questions for each study are intended to get you thinking about the most important things that the author wants us to understand from each passage. After each of the studies there's a short summary which explains the main point of the passage - but try not to skip straight to this if you're finding one of the questions difficult. Studying the Bible takes thought and isn't always easy, but it's important that you have patience and work hard at understanding it for yourself. If you get really stuck and confused and feel you need the help of the explanation, then do make sure you refer back to the passage again as you read it so that you can see where the points come from in the text.

As you go through the studies, you'll occasionally come across these symbols:



#PRINCIPLE

This symbol accompanies a key principle to learn for studying the Bible.



#METHOD

This symbol accompanies a method which you might find helpful for studying the Bible.

You'll also occasionally come across blank pages with this faded symbol in the middle:



This is to keep the summaries at the end of each study separate from the questions, to help you avoid the temptation of looking across the page for the answers without first working hard at the passage yourself! You could use this space to make notes.

Note on translations

These studies were prepared from the ESV, and it's recommended that you use either that or a translation with a similar level of accuracy to the original wording of the Biblical languages. Without going into all the reasons for this, an important one is that such translations often help make connections between ideas in different passages easier to pick up on because a common word is translated consistently.

Introduction to Micah

The prophets are a rich, yet sadly often neglected part of the Bible (particularly the Minor Prophets). There are a number of reasons why this is a tragedy (presumably God made sure a large number of them were included in the canon of Scripture for a reason!). For one thing, the prophets interpret some of the most important events in the Old Testament (like the exile), and introduce some of the most important concepts that are developed in the New Testament (like the New Creation).

Sometimes when we switch between reading the Old and New Testaments, it can feel to us like the NT is very different, suddenly introducing lots of big new ideas and radically changing our understanding of OT categories. However, really this often betrays the fact that we've not spent very much time studying the prophets. If we were more familiar with the prophets, we might see how they transition us much more smoothly into the New Testament by beginning to gradually change our expectations about how God's promises are going to be fulfilled.

We hope that makes you excited about digging your teeth into Micah over the next little while.

As usual, along the way we'll be learning some specific principles and methods that are helpful to bear in mind as we read the genre of prophecy in particular.

Enjoy!

More study guides can be found at www.miningthebible.co.uk.

OVERVIEW STUDY

Questions:

Read through the whole of Micah. Have the questions below in mind as you read through, then try to answer them.

1) Divide up the book into sections (minimum 2, maximum 6).

2) What problems are Israel facing?

3) What does Micah reveal about God's immediate and long-term plans?

4) Who do you think Micah's prophecy is primarily for, and what do you think the main purpose of it is? Try to formulate the latter thought into a purpose statement for the book in 10 words or fewer.



#METHOD – Figuring out the prophetic setting.

Before we dive in, there are some basic contextual questions that are particularly pertinent to the prophets which we need to ask ourselves. Who was this prophesy originally directed at: the northern Kingdom of Israel, the Southern Kingdom of Judah, or both? What was the religious, political and international state of the nation at the time? And when was this spoken in relation to major events like the exile? Often the opening verses of the book tell us who the prophet was addressing and who was on the throne at the time. We can then use what we know about the reigns of those kings in 1 & 2 Kings and 1 & 2 Chronicles to find answers to the second two questions. We've tried to summarise the major game-changing historical events to be aware of in the following 'Background to Micah' section.



BACKGROUND TO MICAH

At the end of 1 Samuel, we saw the death of King Saul and the rise of David (this assumes you've completed the 1 Samuel study guide in this series - if not, sorry for the spoiler!). In 2 Samuel, David ascends to the throne and becomes Israel's greatest King in the Old Testament.

Under the rule of David and then his son Solomon, Israel enjoys a golden period of peace and prosperity, coming closest to looking like God's promises had been fulfilled. During this period David is given a hugely significant promise from God (2 Samuel 7) of a son from His line whose reign will last forever.

Sadly, this golden era doesn't last. Both David and Solomon sin, with disastrous consequences for both themselves and the nation. Over the next 400 years kings come and go, and though there are a few exceptions, most are ungodly and lead God's people astray, and none of them proves to be the everlasting Messiah that God had promised David. The people of Israel are persistently rebellious. As a result of their sin, three major, disastrous events rock the nation during this period:

- **922 BC** - the Kingdom of Israel splits into two: the northern Kingdom (called Israel - but also referred to as Ephraim, or her capital, Samaria) and the southern Kingdom (called Judah). Judah contains the Davidic monarchy, the city of Jerusalem and the Temple.
- **722 BC** - Assyria, the emerging superpower in the area, conquers the northern Kingdom and the survivors disappear (2 Kings 17). Assyria invades Judah, and sweeps through the land right up to Jerusalem, but God listens to King Hezekiah's prayer and saves Judah, wiping out the Assyrian army overnight (2 Kings 18-19).
- **586 BC** - Babylon conquers Judah and takes her into exile (2 Kings 25).

We learn from the information in Micah 1:1 that he is a prophet of Judah speaking in the 8th century BC (i.e. around the time of the second bullet point). In fact, a

comparison with Isaiah 1:1 shows that both he and Micah were prophesying in Judah at the same time - and it turns out that they share an awful lot in common (for example Mic 4:1-5 is virtually identical to Is 2:1-5). Isaiah is one of the most significant books in the Old Testament, but it's also one of the longest, and contains some ideas that would have been so category-shifting to an Israelite reader that they'd have made much of the book hard to grasp.

In the same way that commentators sometimes produce abridged versions of their works to make them more easily digestible to the average reader, Micah is a bit like an abridged version of Isaiah - it's a much shorter book which functions as a basic introduction to some of the really important themes that Isaiah develops in greater depth, including one of the most important events in Israel's history: the exile.

STUDY 1: 1:1-16

Questions:

1) Who is God going to come and judge (3 groups)?

2) Why might that have surprised the original hearers? (Esp. v5, 9)

3) How do you think a Judean's emotions would have changed through the passage?

4) Why is God coming in judgment?

(Note: 'high places' were where shrines to idols were located.)

a) Why does v5 mention the capitals, Samaria and Jerusalem?

b) God is going to charge Israel for many more things (esp. lack of justice) through the book. So why do you think He starts with the issue of idolatry?



#METHOD – Using commentaries.

The whole point of these study guides is to help you learn to read the Bible for yourself, without relying on external aids. But that doesn't mean it isn't helpful to benefit from the expertise and long-term study of other believers.

Commentaries have their strengths and weaknesses, and it's good to be aware of them. In general, though there are some exceptions, they're often weak at showing the overall logic, emphases and application of whole passages. But they can be good aids on the scale of understanding fine detail, individual verses, issues of translation and historical & geographical background information. Of course, it's best to try to have a good stab at understanding the passage ourselves before turning to a commentary, so that we don't just rely on their take on things. And it's a good idea when possible to consult more than one commentary so that we can assess more than one opinion.

V10-15 are a good example of occasions that commentaries can help. The literal meaning of the Hebrew town names reveal that Micah is employing some poetic word play. On this occasion we've done the leg work for you in putting together the table below, but you could find the same information in any decent commentary on Micah (we recommend the ones by Dale Ralph Davis & Bruce Waltke).

Hebrew Name	Meaning
Beth-le-aphrah	Dust town
Shaphir	Beauty Town
Zaanah	Going forth town
Beth-ezel	Take away town
Maroth	Bitter town
Lachish	Impregnable town
Moresbeth-gath	Bride town
Achzib	Deception town
Mareshah	Possession town

5) What will God's judgment be like?

a) What do we learn about the nature of it?

b) What do we learn about the extent of it?

c) To what extent do you think this judgment is avoidable?

d) Think of as many adjectives as you can to describe it.

6) Have a go at coming up with a short summary sentence for chapter 1.

Application:

1) Why do you think God begins by announcing judgment on the whole world, when most of the rest of the book is about judgment on Israel/Judah?

2) What are the key things we're learning about God's final judgment on the world?

3) Why is final judgment an important reality to keep in mind?



#PRINCIPLE – The multiple peaks of prophetic fulfilment.

Have you ever had that experience where you look at a mountain peak and think it's the top, only to get there and discover it's really a 'false peak' - hidden behind it is a higher peak - and it dawns on you that you actually have a lot further to go? The fulfilment of Biblical prophecy is often like that! We read prophecies that feel like they point to very specific episodes in Israel's history - but those initial fulfilments are really false peaks, little miniature tasters of much bigger, more significant events in God's plan for the world.

4) Write out a similar poem using word plays on cities in your country, foretelling their destruction when Jesus returns. How does this change the way you think about these places?